

A RESPONSE TO "THE INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURES" BY DR. HOWARD TEPKER

LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD CONVOCATION
APRIL 14, 1975

I wish to thank Dr. Tepker for his clear and helpful paper on "The Inspiration and Inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures". It is my prayer that his contribution will do much to strengthen us all in our faithfulness to Scripture, and to clarify the issues that confront us.

My response will attempt at nothing profound. There is no reason for me to recapitulate the doctrine which he has so ably presented. No reason at all. You all know the doctrine. It has been the continued belief of God's people since the days of the prophets and apostles. The divine origin and inerrancy of Scripture was the position of our Lord Jesus Himself, of the Apostles, the Church Fathers, the Reformers and of our own Synod.

I wish only to add a few points to Dr. Tepker's presentation, points which the purpose of Dr. Tepker's paper did not allow him to consider. The points I wish to make and discuss are the following:

1. A major issue in our Synod today centers in the authority of Scripture, not merely in the interpretation of Scripture.
2. The authority of Scripture entails the inerrancy of Scripture.
3. Inerrancy entails real referents for Biblical assertions.

1. A major issue in our Synod today centers in the authority

of Scripture, not merely in the interpretation of Scripture.

I make this assertion not because I believe that Biblical hermeneutics is not a major issue in our Synod today. It most certainly is. Theologians in our Synod are boldly using the Historical Critical Method as they approach the divine Scriptures, and they are defending their actions. And such a method is an interpretative method which certainly affects and undermines one's doctrine of Biblical authority. Nor do I wish to imply that the divine origin of Scripture is not an issue in our Synod. Exegesis is carried on in our church today with no apparent cognizance of the divine origin of Scripture. Faithful to Our Calling (I, 39-40) refuses to list the inspiration of Scripture as either a hermeneutical rule or a presupposition for reading the Scriptures. This makes Biblical inspiration hardly worth talking about, if it does not affect our exegesis in any way. Nor am I denying, by any means, that inerrancy is an issue today, as I shall demonstrate later.

When I say that a major issue facing our church centers in the authority of Scripture, I make this assertion in direct contradiction to the position of some that we all agree concerning the Scripture's authority and only disagree in matters of interpretation and that interpretation is not a matter of doctrine. The most recent

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affirmation of such a position was made by Dr. John Tietjen in a recent article in Christianity Today (April 11, 1975, pp. 676, 679). He publicly criticizes the President of our Synod for saying that the main theological issue in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod today is the authority of Scripture, and asserts, "The answer is a smokescreen. The authority of the Bible is not at issue in the Missouri Synod." Later Dr. Tietjen says, "Isn't the Bible an issue at all in the Missouri Synod controversy? Not the authority of the Bible! Interpreting the Bible is an issue."

Now I am reasonably sure that there is not a person here today who believes Dr. Tietjen's assertion that the authority of the Bible is not at issue in the Missouri Synod. Certainly the perceptive editor of Christianity Today is not taken in by such a transparent fallacy. He puts it well when he says, "The relation between interpretation and inerrancy (or authority) is such that certain interpretations can in effect deny inerrancy (or authority)" (ibid, p.681). The President of our Synod already in September, 1972, had said something similar when he reported to the Synod concerning the theology of the erstwhile faculty majority at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, in Compliance with Resolutions 2-28 of the 49th Regular Convention of the Synod, held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

July 9-16, 1971, p.22): "Within the faculty, the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures is subverted to the point where, in effect, a false doctrine is proclaimed regarding them. The faculty does indeed proclaim its allegiance to the Scriptures as the primary norm of Christian doctrine. However, in fact, the majority hold a view of the Scriptures which in practice (Emphasis mine) erodes the authority of Scripture. Verbal inspiration, as it is commonly understood in the Synod, is not taught by all. The inerrancy of the Scriptures is severely limited." And then massive evidence is assembled to prove the points made.

But there is a second aberration in Dr. Tietjen's assertion, perhaps more serious than its contradiction of plain facts. The assertion springs from a position concerning Biblical authority which divorces that authority from the interpretation of Biblical texts and the meaning of the texts. The assertion is false not only because it is contrary to plain facts; it is false in the nature of the case. The interpretation of Scripture impinges upon the authority of Scripture. Let me illustrate.

The Arian, Socinian, Jehovah Witness denial of the deity of our Lord has always been professedly asserted on the basis of a correct interpretation of Scripture. Is the deity of Christ therefore in this case merely a matter of Biblical interpretation?

Is the doctrine of Biblical authority left unimpaired by such a heresy? When Zwingli denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar on the basis of an interpretation of Scripture which went back to Aristotle's notions concerning finity and infinity, Luther perceived clearly that, among other things, the authority of Scripture was at stake.

He said, "I for one cannot admit that such clear words present a (hermeneutical) problem (quaestio)."¹ In his Large Catechism, (LC, TV, 57, FC, Epit. VII, 13), Luther again makes it quite clear that a denial or doubting of the real presence constitutes doubt concerning the truthfulness and authority of Scripture.

Our Lord Jesus held to the same principle. To interpret the Scriptures wrongly or to fail to find their message was to Him tantamount to disbelieving them. To the Emmaus disciples He said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," (Luke 24:25). Later Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). When Jesus differs with the Sadducees concerning their interpretation of Scripture as it touched the Resurrection--for their denial of the Resurrection was based upon a very definite interpretation of

1 Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959, p. 231 & passim.

Scripture--He said, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures. . .?" (Mark 12:24). To know in this context means to believe and accept the Scriptures. Again to the Pharisees who would not accept His Messianic claims, He said it was not just a matter of interpretation but of believing the authoritative Word. "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47; cf. Luke 16:29:31). Certainly the Pharisees would have claimed that they believed in the authority of the Scriptures, of Moses. But they didn't, Jesus says. Their failure to believe in Jesus was a rejection of Moses and therefore of Biblical authority.

No, like the Pharisees, one may protest to high heaven that one affirms and teaches the authority of Scripture. But that doesn't make it so. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Romanists, Zwingli, the S^cicinians, and the Jehovah Witnesses have all made this claim. And in each case the position enunciated concerning Biblical authority is quite similar formally to that of historic Lutheranism. But a pro forma profession of Biblical authority is no better than a pro forma subscription to the Confessions.

The divorcing of Biblical interpretation from Biblical authority is commonly accompanied by another even more serious aberration.

This is the teaching that Biblical authority is a doctrinal issue, whereas the interpretation of Scripture is not. We are told, for instance, that various and even contradictory methods of interpreting Scripture are possible in the church, (Faithful to Our Calling, p. 40). Or we are told that "the Sacred Scriptures lay down no rules for interpretation and prescribe no method for communicating the message of the Scriptures to successive generations of Christians" (Faithful to Our Calling, I, 39). Or we are warned against "official" interpretations of Scripture. Or we are told--and this has been done repeatedly by Dr. Tietjen--that Confessional subscription does not bind us to the exegesis of the Lutheran Confessions. In every case the implication is that interpretation, or the results of exegesis, is not binding.

Two tragic results accrue from this position. First, if the issue in our Synod is not a matter of Biblical authority, but only of interpretation, and if the interpretations given to Scripture are not binding or final, then we cannot continue to exist as a Confessional Church. Our Confessions purport to offer a correct exposition of Scripture. They do not propound any doctrine that is not firmly grounded in the Scriptures.² If we are not bound to any "official"

² See Introduction to the Book of Concord, (Tappert, pp. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12. cf. 504-406)

interpretation in Scripture, then we are not bound to interpretations or exegetical conclusions of our Confessions either. And if we are not bound by the exegetical conclusions of our Confessions, we are not bound by the doctrinal content either, for the doctrinal content is nothing else than the conclusions of exegesis, or Biblical interpretation.

Second, if there are no Biblical and therefore authoritative rules of interpreting Scripture, and if the interpretation of Scripture is not binding, then we may disagree on what Scripture says. But then what possible authority does Scripture have? To say that there is no final exegesis or binding and necessary interpretation for Biblical passages is to destroy the doctrine of Biblical authority entirely, by making it impossible of application and therefore meaningless.

2. The authority of Scripture entails the inerrancy of Scripture.

In all the discussions, probings, debates in our Synod concerning the Historical Critical Method, one fact has emerged clearly: Those who advocate the method--all their protestations that they are Confessional and that they adhere to the so-called "Lutheran" presuppositions of Biblical interpretation to the contrary

notwithstanding--admit that there can be and are errors of fact in Scripture. If we had agreed that there were simply no errors of any kind in Scripture, the Historical Critical Method would never have been introduced into our circles and many of our present problems would not exist. For the inerrancy of Scripture is an important presupposition and norm for reading Scripture which, if abandoned, will leave Scripture to the whims of historicism or relativism or just the personal predilections of the interpreter.

What has happened to becloud the issue is that the practitioners of the Historical Critical Method in our midst have, in contrast to most of their counterparts outside our circles, asserted slogans affirming authority, but in one way or another abandoned the inerrancy of Scripture.

It is my contention that this cannot be done. To speak of Biblical authority or inspiration becomes a mere cliché or phrase unless it entails inerrancy in the sense of freedom of error and contradiction. As one theologian has put it, inerrancy is an instant "litmus-test" to tell us whether terms like inspiration and inerrancy are being used seriously or just rhetorically and emotively.³

³ Kurt Marquart, "The Swing of the Pendulum: An Attempt to Understand the St. Louis "Affirmations and Discussions" in Occasional Papers, Spring, 1973, p. 17.

To seek to distinguish between truth and error in Scripture eo ipso denies that Scripture is God's Word and divinely authoritative. An errant Word of God is a contradiction in terms. To say that Scripture is divinely authoritative and contains errors is meaningless.

There is not time here to demonstrate historically that until very recently--and then among only the smallest segment of inhibited theologians--Christians have always held that the divine authority of Scripture entailed inerrancy. Suffice it to say that in the days of bold and honest rationalism and of classical Liberalism, both authority and inerrancy were frankly denied together.

What I do wish to do at this point is to illustrate just how the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy is being jettisoned by Moderates in our circles and how the doctrine of Scripture's authority is thereby being threatened.

There are several approaches to the subject of inerrancy by Moderate theologians. Occasionally, the doctrine is caricatured, and then a fictitious heterodoxy is summarily rejected. Or those who hold the historic doctrine are ridiculed and insulted and bombastically misrepresented so as to cow them into embarrassment

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or silence.

Often the term is used, but redefined. Let me offer an example of this latter approach which has wrought much havoc in our Synod. I refer to Dr. Herbert Mayer's editorial in the Concordia Theological Monthly (Sept. 1969, pp 527-8) in which he first caricatures the view of inerrancy always held in our Synod, then takes a pot shot at this caricatured definition as "double-barreled" (whatever that means!) and finally, without Biblical warrant, offers his own completely novel definition of inerrancy, namely, that Scripture infallibly accomplishes God's purpose and is true and reliable in that sense. His new definition has no precedent, no basis is offered for it, and it makes no sense. It is just asserted. And of course, it deceives people. Because

4 For an example of this approach see Robert Smith, "Scriptural Authority Among Lutherans" in Lutheran Forum, October 1968, pp. 12-13. Smith calls those of us who believe that Biblical authority is an issue among Lutherans today "theological thumb suckers", "finger pointers" who "get some psychological kick out of identifying imaginary deviations." He is tempted to reject, he says, "verbal inspiration" because of how it has been understood by early Lutherans, but he accepts the term in the sense the Bible from cover to cover tells us the good news that Jesus has redeemed us (sic). Those of us who believe in it in the usual sense, are called "scholastics".

the word is used while the doctrine is denied. And it deceives some into thinking that those of us who believe in inerrancy in the same sense as did Walther, Pieper, Stoeckhardt, Engelder, Arndt, Graebner, and all the theological leaders of the past, are somehow the innovators, imposing some new test of orthodoxy, or new definition of inerrancy, upon unwary Christians.

Often the doctrine of inerrancy is ignored as unimportant, pooh-poohed, belittled, misrepresented and treated as some sort of theologoumenon. This seems to be the tack of Faithful to Our Calling. Listen to some examples of the way inerrancy is alluded to there.

We could begin with the assumption that the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility guarantees the validity of our theology or our interpretation of the Scriptures. But to follow these approaches would not be Lutheran. (p. 20).

Any tendency to make the doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith, is sectarian. The Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa. (p. 21).

Even though we may not be able to harmonize historical discrepancies which appear in the New Testament Gospel accounts, that fact does not shake our faith or invalidate these accounts as the Word of God. (p. 25).

The reliability or "inerrancy" of the Scriptures cannot be determined by twentieth century standards of factuality. Nor do the Scriptures link the work of the Holy Spirit with this kind of "inerrancy". (p. 37).

Putting these statements together one gets the distinct impression that the former faculty majority at Concordia Seminary do not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture one little bit. To use the term at all in any positive sense is an obvious embarrassment to them. It is not even mentioned in their discussion of inspiration. (p. 35).

Still another approach to the subject of innerrancy is to make it an open question. The Moderate Caucus of the ACDC has expressed this position quite clearly, (See Moderate Response to Conservative Draft on Gospel and Scripture, March 2, 1974), "For concord and peace in our church body, we do need to agree on the nature of the Bible. But we may not bind one another to any definitions of that nature, including its inspiration, innerrancy, and authority, which are not found in Scriptures themselves." Since the Moderate Caucus, like the erstwhile faculty majority, maintains there is in Scripture no definition at all of inspiration, of Biblical authority or of innerrancy, the conclusion must be that we cannot and even ought not believe in any of these articles. Obviously, if we cannot bind ourselves to the definition of a doctrine, we need not bind ourselves to the doctrine itself. But by what logical or hermeneutic right is such a narrow position held? There is no definition in Scripture of the Trinity, but we hold to the doctrine. Or of the Personal Union. Or even of

justification (dikaioo); but we believe we are justified by faith in Christ, and we know what that means. And I am bound by it.

I think I have now clearly demonstrated how the issues of Biblical authority and inerrancy have been evaded and beclouded in our midst by certain Moderates who have deviated from our historic position. But under all the obfuscation, facts emerge, clear and unmistakable. The doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, as held in our church during its entire history, is now denied--obliquely, subtly, by inuendo, by redefinition, by equivocation, mitigation, qualification--but nevertheless denied, clearly and unmistakably. And the erstwhile faculty majority has led the onslaught. And that is what it is, an onslaught. And its artillery has been the Historical Critical Method, cleverly disguised by scholarly language, pious and evangelical phrases, but all the time backing away from the organic foundation of our faith, an authoritative and inerrant Scripture.

I think it is in place here and now to challenge my former colleagues at Seminex and all who prefer the title "Moderate". Where do you stand vis à vis the inerrancy of Scripture? Can you subscribe wholeheartedly to our historic Missouri Synod position? I will offer some typical statements on errancy by the Fathers

of our Synod. Tell us all whether you agree with all your heart to these statements.

Luther (W² 15, 1481): "The Scriptures have never erred."

Luther (W² 9, 356): "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."

Walther (CTM, April, 1939. p. 255): "Whoever thinks that he can find one error in holy Scripture does not believe in holy Scripture but in himself; for even if he accepted everything else as true, he would believe it not because Scripture says so but because it agrees with his reason or with his sentiments." (Cf. LuW, 21, 35).

Walther (LuW, 34, 196): "If we conceded that only the least error could be present in the Bible, then it is up to man to separate the truth from the error. Man, then, is placed above the Scriptures, and Scripture ceases to be the source and norm of faith. Human reason is made the norm of truth, and Scripture sinks to the level of a norma normata. The least deviation from the old inspiration doctrine introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and contaminates the whole body of doctrine."

The Brief Statement: "Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters."

3. Inerrancy entails real referents for Biblical assertions.

What I am saying in this thesis is this: To talk of inerrancy when one will not accept the historicity or factuality underlying every assertion in Scripture is a contradiction in terms, a denial

of the very concern which underlies the insistent use of the term inerrancy and of the very meaning of the term. The church has never in Gnostic, docetic, Platonic, Idealistic, or Kantian fashion affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture apart from the reality of the referents of Biblical assertions, whether they be people, things, events, God, or whatever. According to the belief of historic Christianity, Biblical assertions are true because they correspond to reality; historical, geographical, topological, ontological, as the case may be. For instance, in Lutheran theology, the Biblical statement, "This is my body" is true--Luther comments here that "God's Word is not false nor does it lie" (FC, Epit. VII, 13)--because, and only because, the consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Supper are really (realiter et substantialiter) Christ's body and blood, that body and blood which were given and shed historically and really for the sins of the world. (See Sasse, op. cit., p. 360 passim). This same principle of realism holds true, according to Lutheran theology, whether Scripture speaks of God (AC I, 2: quae et appellatur et est Deus), or original sin (AC II, 2: vitium originis vere sit peccatum), or the deity and humanity of Christ (AG III, 2: vere Deus et vere homo), or even the historic events in His life (ibid, vere passus, crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus). And the principle hold true not only in the Biblical statements pertaining to articles of faith: (e. g. I am justified

before God by faith in Christ, really, Scripture is the Word of God really, not metaphorically or metonymically). It holds true also for those statements in Scripture which deal with history, whether Scripture speaks of the Fall of Adam and Eve, or the flood, or the Exodus, or the fish swallowing Jonah.

The principle I have been affirming is no linguistic, or ontological, or hermeneutical trick or mere declamation. It is a principle which undergirds the theology of Scripture and is taken most seriously by the Christian Church in its creeds and our own Lutheran Church in its confessions and theology. And it was to safeguard this principle of realism, at least in part, that the term inerrancy has been used so insistently by orthodox Christians in our day of subjectivism, existentialism, and idealism, and various forms of dualism. (Barth; Tillich et al.)

Bearing on this is the fact that there are certain recently invented genres being imposed upon Scripture today which have no validity when ascribed to Scripture and are in the nature of the case contrary to the Biblical realism of our faith, (e.g. symbolic history, didactic tale, etiological myth, faith event). Such contrived genres invariably turn Biblical theology into myth or ideology, do

violence to the intended sense and analogy of Scripture, and make theology a word game with no empirical or ontological (real) basis.⁵ Thus we talk about Adam and Eve, but they never existed in history and therefore never existed at all. We talk of the Fall, but it is not historical and therefore has no existence at all, at least no meaningful existence. We speak of the sign of Jonah, but it never existed prior to the day that Christ spoke of it. All typology turns out to be after the event, a New Testament word game; and it doesn't matter whether any of these types, revealed by God during Israel's history, had any reality. Even the Resurrection and the miracles of Jesus become mere ideas or symbols for something else, faith events (like the Exodus), constructed by the pious imagination of God's people, but having no reality. That's where this kind of dualistic, idealistic exegesis has led us today. Think of it: Neither Dr. Tietjen in his recent Christianity Today article, nor the erstwhile faculty majority in its Faithful to Our Calling (p. 18) make any distinction between Jesus' miracles, including his Resurrection, and the miracles we experience today (in latter case, the term has to be taken metaphorically).

5 It ought to be clear that parabolic, apocalyptic and highly figurative language, often found throughout Scripture, is not being rejected here, but rather those forms which deny any real or empirical referent outside man's own subjective opinions or ideas. Clearly parables and metaphors and apocalyptic language do have real referents outside of man's own subjective experiences or reflections.

Obviously no one in our Synod has espoused such a radical theology as the denial of the facticity of the Resurrection. But the Faithful to Our Calling study by the erstwhile faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis has said things which are quite compatible with such a purely formal theology. On p. 26 it is said, "We know the Promise is true and our faith affirms it, because through that Promise we have come to know our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make the Promise dependent on the historical authenticity of every detail of the Scriptures (what about simply the historicity of the event proclaimed) destroys the Promise. We begin by listening to the Promise and hearing the message that 'Jesus died and rose for me.' If we keep asking, 'Did Jesus really rise?' we will never hear the Promise." This is a radical statement. The theological approach enunciated is simply this: The question "Did it happen?" is subordinate or posterior or secondary to the question, "What happened?" Such a position is nonsensical in that the reality, or ontological referent, underlying a statement or belief, let us say, concerning the Resurrection, must be prior, at least logically, to its meaning and interpretation. Who would ever ask "What happened?" until he was first convinced that something actually happened? But such a position is also patently unBiblical. The first preachment of the Resurrection that we know of (Mark 16:6: He is risen; He is not here.) stated the historic and ontological reality of the Resurrection

before a word about its meaning. Of course, we could argue that the interpretation and theology of the Resurrection was already given to Mary and Salome in advance by Jesus and the Old Testament. But even so, we must grant that the reality of the Resurrection (and the empty tomb) is essential and foundational for its meaning. What happened in reference to this event is totally bound up and contingent upon whether it happened. The angel recognized this, and the answer to the question "Did it happen (that is, the Resurrection)" is the only Gospel preachment of the Resurrection in Mark.

The same principle is true, whether we speak of Adam and Eve, the Flood, Jonah and the great fish, the Trinity, the Lord's Supper, or whatever. The kind of functional interpretation one meets in Faithful to Our Calling at this point and elsewhere in the theological approach of Moderate theologians simply overthrows the inerrancy of Scripture in the sense in which it has been understood by the Christian Church through its history, and it can at any point, overthrow the Christian faith itself. For instance, if one rejects the real presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper, one rejects the Biblical doctrine itself. If one rejects the immanent (ontological, essential) Trinity, one rejects the doctrine of the Trinity itself. If one rejects the reality of original sin or the reality of its basis in a historic

Fall, one rejects the doctrine itself. If one rejects the reality of the empty tomb (Emil Brunner), one rejects the Resurrection itself, all protestations and formal Chalcedonian theology to the contrary notwithstanding. If one rejects the reality of the miraculous events making up the Exodus, one denies the Exodus itself. If one rejects the reality of my justification before God or makes it merely an "image" of the Gospel working in me (Faithful to Our Calling, p. 26) or of the "Gospel event" (ibid. what does that mean?) and thus implies that such language is figurative and not literally descriptive of what actually happens, one denies justification itself.

It has been no pleasure for me to speak in such a candid and frank manner about what I consider to be serious doctrinal differences in our midst. I would have far preferred to have spoken in simple, positive and traditional terms about our most precious faith, professing my personal faith in the Gospel, my love of the brethren and my dedication to the church and its mission of reconciliation. But I was asked to react in terms of the situation in our dear church as I see it. And this is what I have seen; I cannot see a house divided against itself--my house!--and remain silent and passive. May our merciful God graciously lead us to repentance so that we might ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and find rest for our souls. (Jer. 6:16).

ROBERT D. PREUS

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Exegesis is carried on in our church today with no apparent cognizance of the divine origin of Scripture. Faithful to Our Calling (I, 39-40) refuses to list the inspiration of Scripture as either a hermeneutical rule or a presupposition for reading the Scriptures. This makes Biblical inspiration hardly worth talking about, if it does not affect our exegesis in any way. Nor am I denying, by any means, that inerrancy is an issue today, as I shall demonstrate later.

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affirmation of such a position was made by Dr. John Tietjen in a recent article in Christianity Today (April 11, 1975, pp. 676, 679). He publicly criticizes the President of our Synod for saying that the main theological issue in the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod today is the authority of Scripture, and asserts, "The answer is a smokescreen. The authority of the Bible is not at issue in the Missouri Synod." Later Dr. Tietjen says, "Isn't the Bible an issue at all in the Missouri Synod controversy? Not the authority of the Bible! Interpreting the Bible is an issue."

Now I am reasonably sure that there is not a person here today who believes Dr. Tietjen's assertion that the authority of the Bible is not at issue in the Missouri Synod. Certainly the perceptive editor of Christianity Today is not taken in by such a transparent fallacy. He puts it well when he says, "The relation between interpretation and inerrancy (or authority) is such that certain interpretations can in effect deny inerrancy (or authority) " (ibid, p.681). The President of our Synod already in September, 1972, had said something similar when he reported to the Synod concerning the theology of the erstwhile faculty majority at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in Compliance with Resolutions 2-28 of the 49th Regular Convention of the Synod, held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

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The Arian, Socinian, Jehovah Witness denial of the deity of our Lord has always been professedly asserted on the basis of a correct interpretation of Scripture. Is the deity of Christ therefore in this case merely a matter of Biblical interpretation?

Is the doctrine of Biblical authority left unimpaired by such a heresy? When Zwingli denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar on the basis of an interpretation of Scripture which went back to Aristotle's notions concerning finity and infinity, Luther perceived clearly that, among other things, the authority of Scripture was at stake. He said, "I for one cannot admit that such clear words present a (hermeneutical) problem (quaestio)."¹ In his Large Catechism, (LC, TV, 57, FC, Epit. VII, 13), Luther again makes it quite clear that a denial or doubting of the real presence constitutes doubt concerning the truthfulness and authority of Scripture.

Our Lord Jesus held to the same principle. To interpret the Scriptures wrongly or to fail to find their message was to Him tantamount to disbelieving them. To the Emmaus disciples He said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, " (Luke 24:25). Later Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). When Jesus differs with the Sadducees concerning their interpretation of Scripture as it touched the Resurrection--for their denial of the Resurrection was based upon a very definite interpretation of

1 Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959, p. 231 & passim.

Scripture--He said, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures. . . ?" (Mark 12:24). To know in this context means to believe and accept the Scriptures. Again to the Pharisees who would not accept His Messianic claims, He said it was not just a matter of interpretation but of believing the authoritative Word. "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47; cf. Luke 16:29:31). Certainly the Pharisees would have claimed that they believed in the authority of the Scriptures, of Moses. But they didn't, Jesus says. Their failure to believe in Jesus was a rejection of Moses and therefore of Biblical authority.

No, like the Pharisees, one may protest to high heaven that one affirms and teaches the authority of Scripture. But that doesn't make it so. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Romanists, Zwingli, the Socinians, and the Jehovah Witnesses have all made this claim. And in each case the position enunciated concerning Biblical authority is quite similar formally to that of historic Lutheranism. But a pro forma profession of Biblical authority is no better than a pro forma subscription to the Confessions.

The divorcing of Biblical interpretation from Biblical authority is commonly accompanied by another even more serious aberration.

This is the teaching that Biblical authority is a doctrinal issue, whereas the interpretation of Scripture is not. We are told, for instance, that various and even contradictory methods of interpreting Scripture are possible in the church, (Faithful to Our Calling, p. 40). Or we are told that "the Sacred Scriptures lay down no rules for interpretation and prescribe no method for communicating the message of the Scriptures to successive generations of Christians" (Faithful to Our Calling, I, 39). Or we are warned against "official" interpretations of Scripture. Or we are told--and this has been done repeatedly by Dr. Tietjen--that Confessional subscription does not bind us to the exegesis of the Lutheran Confessions. In every case the implication is that interpretation, or the results of exegesis, is not binding.

Two tragic results accrue from this position. First, if the issue in our Synod is not a matter of Biblical authority, but only of interpretation, and if the interpretations given to Scripture are not binding or final, then we cannot continue to exist as a Confessional Church. Our Confessions purport to offer a correct exposition of Scripture. They do not propound any doctrine that is not firmly grounded in the Scriptures.² If we are not bound to any "official"

² See Introduction to the Book of Concord, (Tappert, pp. 3, 4, 5, 6 8, 12. cf. 504-406)

interpretation in Scripture, then we are not bound to interpretations or exegetical conclusions of our Confessions either. And if we are not bound by the exegetical conclusions of our Confessions, we are not bound by the doctrinal content either, for the doctrinal content is nothing else than the conclusions of exegesis, or Biblical interpretation.

Second, if there are no Biblical and therefore authoritative rules of interpreting Scripture, and if the interpretation of Scripture is not binding, then -we may disagree on what Scripture says. But then what possible authority does Scripture have? To say that there is no final exegesis or binding and necessary interpretation for Biblical passages is to destroy the doctrine of Biblical authority entirely, by making it impossible of application and therefore meaningless.

2. The authority of Scripture entails the inerrancy of Scripture.

In all the discussions, probings, debates in our Synod concerning the Historical Critical Method, one fact has emerged clearly: Those who advocate the method--all their protestations that they are Confessional and that they adhere to the so-called "Lutheran" presuppositions of Biblical interpretation to the contrary

notwithstanding--admit that there can be and are errors of fact in Scripture. If we had agreed that there were simply no errors of any kind in Scripture, the Historical Critical Method would never have been introduced into our circles and many of our present problems would not exist. For the inerrancy of Scripture is an important presupposition and norm for reading Scripture which, if abandoned, will leave Scripture to the whims of historicism or relativism or just the personal predilections of the interpreter.

What has happened to becloud the issue is that the practitioners of the Historical Critical Method in our midst have, in contrast to most of their counterparts outside our circles, asserted slogans affirming authority, but in one way or another abandoned the inerrancy of Scripture.

It is my contention that this cannot be done. To speak of Biblical authority or inspiration becomes a mere cliché or phrase unless it entails inerrancy in the sense of freedom of error and contradiction. As one theologian has put it, inerrancy is an instant "litmus-test" to tell us whether terms like inspiration and inerrancy are being used seriously or just rhetorically and emotively.³

3 Kurt Marquart, "The Swing of the Pendulum: An Attempt to Understand the St. Louis 'Affirmations and Discussions'" in Occasional Papers, Spring, 1973, p. 17.

To seek to distinguish between truth and error in Scripture eo ipso denies that Scripture is God's Word and divinely authoritative. An errant Word of God is a contradiction in terms. To say that Scripture is divinely authoritative and contains errors is meaningless.

There is not time here to demonstrate historically that until very recently-- and then among only the smallest segment of inhibited theologians--Christians have always held that the divine authority of Scripture entailed inerrancy. Suffice it to say that in the days of bold and honest rationalism and of classical Liberalism, both authority and inerrancy were frankly denied together.

What I do wish to do at this point is to illustrate just how the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy is being jettisoned by Moderates in our circles and how the doctrine of Scripture's authority is thereby being threatened.

There are several approaches to the subject of inerrancy by Moderate theologians. Occasionally, the doctrine is caricatured, and then a fictitious heterodoxy is summarily rejected. Or those who hold the historic doctrine are ridiculed and insulted and bombastically misrepresented so as to cow them into embarrassment

or silence.⁴

Often the term *is* used, but redefined. Let me offer an example of this latter approach which has wrought much havoc in our Synod. I refer to Dr. Herbert Mayer's editorial in the Concordia Theological Monthly (Sept. 1969, pp. 527-8) in which he first caricatures the view of inerrancy always held in our Synod, then takes a pot shot at this caricatured definition as "double-barreled" (whatever that means!) and finally, without Biblical warrant, offers his own completely novel definition of inerrancy, namely, that Scripture infallibly accomplishes God's purpose and is true and reliable in that sense. His new definition has no precedent, no basis is offered for it, and it makes no sense. It is just asserted. And of course, it deceives people. Because

4 For an example of this approach see Robert Smith, "Scriptural Authority Among Lutherans" in Lutheran Forum, October 1968, pp. 12-13. Smith calls those of us who believe that Biblical authority is an issue among Lutherans today "theological thumb suckers", "finger pointers" who "get some psychological kick out of identifying imaginary deviations." He is tempted to reject, he says, "verbal inspiration" because of how it has been understood by early Lutherans, but he accepts the term in the sense the Bible from cover to cover tells us the good news that Jesus has redeemed us (sic). Those of us who believe in it in the usual sense, are called "scholastics".

the word is used while the doctrine is denied. And it deceives some into thinking that those of us who believe in inerrancy in the same sense as did Walther, Pieper, Stoeckhardt, Engelder, Arndt, Graebner, and all the theological leaders of the past, are somehow the innovators, imposing some new test of orthodoxy, or new definition of inerrancy, upon unwary Christians.

Often the doctrine of inerrancy is ignored as unimportant, pooh-poohed, belittled, misrepresented and treated as some sort of theologoumenon. This seems to be the tack of Faithful to Our Calling. Listen to some examples of the way inerrancy is alluded to there.

We could begin with the assumption that the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility guarantees the validity of our theology or our interpretation of the Scriptures. But to follow these approaches would not be Lutheran, (p. 20).

Any tendency to make the doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith, is sectarian. The Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa, (p. 21).

Even though we may not be able to harmonize historical discrepancies which appear in the New Testament Gospel accounts, that fact does not shake our faith or invalidate these accounts as the Word of God. (p. 25).

The reliability or "inerrancy" of the Scriptures cannot be determined by twentieth century standards of factuality.
Nor do the Scriptures link the work of the Holy Spirit with this kind of "inerrancy", (p. 37).

Putting these statements together one gets the distinct impression that the former faculty majority at Concordia Seminary do not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture one little bit. To use the term at all in any positive sense is an obvious embarrassment to them. It is not even mentioned in their discussion of inspiration. (p. 35).

Still another approach to the subject of inerrancy is to make it an open question. The Moderate Caucus of the ACDC has expressed this position quite clearly, (See Moderate Response to Conservative Draft on Gospel and Scripture, March 2, 1974), "For concord and peace in our church body, we do need to agree on the nature of the Bible. But we may not bind one another to any definitions of that nature, including its inspiration, inerrancy, and authority, which are not found in Scriptures themselves." Since the Moderate Caucus, like the erstwhile faculty majority, maintains there is in Scripture no definition at all of inspiration, of Biblical authority or of inerrancy, the conclusion must be that we cannot and even ought not believe in any of these articles. Obviously, if we cannot bind ourselves to the definition of a doctrine, we need not bind ourselves to the doctrine itself. But by what logical or hermeneutic right is such a narrow position held? There is no definition in Scripture of the Trinity, but we hold to the doctrine. Or of the Personal Union. Or even of

justification (dikaioo); but we believe we are justified by faith in Christ, and we know what that means. And I am bound by it.

I think I have now clearly demonstrated how the issues of Biblical authority and inerrancy have been evaded and beclouded in our midst by certain Moderates who have deviated from our historic position. But under all the obfuscation, facts emerge, clear and unmistakable. The doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, as held in our church during its entire history, is now denied--obliquely, subtly, by innuendo, by redefinition, by equivocation, mitigation, qualification--but nevertheless denied, clearly and unmistakably. And the erstwhile faculty majority has led the onslaught. And that is what it is, an onslaught. And its artillery has been the Historical Critical Method, cleverly disguised by scholarly language, pious and evangelical phrases, but all the time backing away from the organic foundation of our faith, an authoritative and inerrant Scripture.

I think it is in place here and now to challenge my former colleagues at Seminex and all who prefer the title "Moderate". Where do you stand vis à vis the inerrancy of Scripture? Can you subscribe wholeheartedly to our historic Missouri Synod position? I will offer some typical statements on errancy by the Fathers

of our Synod. Tell us all whether you agree with all your heart to these statements.

Luther (W² 15, 1481): "The Scriptures have never erred."

Luther (W² 9, 356): "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."

Walther (CTM, April, 1939. p. 255): "Whoever thinks that he can find one error in holy Scripture does not believe in holy Scripture but in himself; for even if he accepted everything else as true, he would believe it not because Scripture says so but because it agrees with his reason or with his sentiments." (Cf. LuW, 21,35).

Walther (LuW, 34, 196): "If we conceded that only the least error could be present in the Bible, then it is up to man to separate the truth from the error. Man, then, is placed above the Scriptures, and Scripture ceases to be the source and norm of faith. Human reason is made the norm of truth, and Scripture sinks to the level of a norma normata. The least deviation from the old inspiration doctrine introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and contaminates the whole body of doctrine. "

The Brief Statement: "Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters. "

3. Inerrancy entails real referents for Biblical assertions.

What I am saying in this thesis is this: To talk of inerrancy when one will not accept the historicity or factuality underlying every assertion in Scripture is a contradiction in terms, a denial

of the very concern which underlies the insistent use of the term inerrancy and of the very meaning of the term. The church has never in Gnostic, docetic, Platonic, Idealistic, or Kantian fashion affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture apart from the reality of the referents of Biblical assertions, whether they be people, things, events, God, or whatever. According to the belief of historic Christianity, Biblical assertions are true because they correspond to reality; historical, geographical, topological, ontological, as the case may be. For instance, in Lutheran theology, the Biblical statement, "This is my body" is true--Luther comments here that "God's Word is not false nor does it lie" (FC, Epit. VII, 13) --because, and only because, the consecrated bread and wine in the Holy Supper are really (realiter et substantialiter) Christ's body and blood, that body and blood which were given and shed historically and really for the sins of the world. (See Sasse, op. cit. , p. 360 passim). This same principle of realism holds true, according to Lutheran theology, whether Scripture speaks of God (AC 1,2: quae et appellatur et est Deus) , or original sin (AC EL, 2: vitium originis vere sit peccatum), or the deity and humanity of Christ (AG III, 2: vere Deus et vere homo), or even the historic events in His life (ibid, vere passus, crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus). And the principle hold true not only in the Biblical statements pertaining to articles of faith: (e. g. I am justified

before God by faith in Christ, really, Scripture is the Word of God really, not metaphorically or metonymically). It holds true also for those statements in Scripture which deal with history, whether Scripture speaks of the Fall of Adam and Eve, or the flood, or the Exodus, or the fish swallowing Jonah.

The principle I have been affirming is no linguistic, or ontological, or hermeneutical trick or mere declamation. It is a principle which undergirds the theology of Scripture and is taken most seriously by the Christian Church in its creeds and our own Lutheran Church in its confessions and theology. And it was to safeguard this principle of realism, at least in part, that the term inerrancy has been used so insistently by orthodox Christians in our day of subjectivism, existentialism, and idealism, and various forms of dualism. (Barth; Tillich et al.)

Bearing on this is the fact that there are certain recently invented genres being imposed upon Scripture today which have no validity when ascribed to Scripture and are in the nature of the case contrary to the Biblical realism of our faith, (e. g. symbolic history, didactic tale, etiological myth, faith event). Such contrived genres invariably turn Biblical theology into myth or ideology, do

violence to the intended sense and analogy of Scripture, and make theology a word game with no empirical or ontological (real) basis.⁵ Thus we talk about Adam and Eve, but they never existed in history and therefore never existed at all. We talk of the Fall, but it is not historical and therefore has no existence at all, at least no meaningful existence. We speak of the sign of Jonah, but it never existed prior to the day that Christ spoke of it. All typology turns out to be after the event, a New Testament word game; and it doesn't matter whether any of these types, revealed by God during Israel's history, had any reality. Even the Resurrection and the miracles of Jesus become mere ideas or symbols for something else, faith events (like the Exodus), constructed by the pious imagination of God's people, but having no reality. That's where this kind of dualistic, idealistic exegesis has led us today. Think of it: Neither Dr. Tietjen in his recent Christianity Today article, nor the erstwhile faculty majority in its Faithful to Our Calling (p. 18) make any distinction between Jesus' miracles, including his Resurrection, and the miracles we experience today (in latter case, the term has to be taken metaphorically).

⁵ It ought to be clear that parabolic, apocalyptic and highly figurative language, often found throughout Scripture, is not being rejected here, but rather those forms which deny any real or empirical referent outside man's own subjective opinions or ideas. Clearly parables and metaphor* and apocalyptic language do have real referents outside of man's own subjective experiences or reflections.

Obviously no one in our Synod has espoused such a radical theology as the denial of the facticity of the Resurrection. But the Faithful to Our Calling study by the erstwhile faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis has said things which are quite compatible with such a purely formal theology. On p. 26 it is said, "We know the Promise is true and our faith affirms it, because through that Promise we have come to know our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make the Promise dependent on the historical authenticity of every detail of the Scriptures (what about simply the historicity of the event proclaimed) destroys the Promise. We begin by listening to the Promise and hearing the message that 'Jesus died and rose for me.' If we keep asking, 'Did Jesus really rise?' we will never hear the Promise." This is a radical statement. The theological approach enunciated is simply this: The question "Did it happen?" is subordinate or posterior or secondary to the question, "What happened?" Such a position is nonsensical in that the reality, or ontological referent, underlying a statement or belief, let us say, concerning the Resurrection, must be prior, at least logically, to its meaning and interpretation. Who would ever ask "What happened?" until he was first convinced that something actually happened? But such a position is also patently unBiblical. The first preachment of the Resurrection that we know of (Mark 16:6: He is risen; He is not here.) stated the historic and ontological reality of the Resurrection

before a word about its meaning. Of course, we could argue that the interpretation and theology of the Resurrection was already given to Mary and Salome in advance by Jesus and the Old Testament.

But even so, we must grant that the reality of the Resurrection (and the empty tomb) is essential and foundational for its meaning. What happened in reference to this event is totally bound up and contingent upon whether it happened. The angel recognized this, and the answer to the question "Did it happen (that is, the Resurrection)" is the only Gospel preachment of the Resurrection in Mark.

The same principle is true, whether we speak of Adam and Eve, the Flood, Jonah and the great fish, the Trinity, the Lord's Supper, or whatever. The kind of functional interpretation one meets in Faithful to Our Calling at this point and elsewhere in the theological approach of Moderate theologians simply overthrows the inerrancy of Scripture in the sense in which it has been understood by the Christian Church through its history, and it can at any point, overthrow the Christian faith itself. For instance, if one rejects the real presence of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper, one rejects the Biblical doctrine itself. If one rejects the immanent (ontological, essential) Trinity, one rejects the doctrine of the Trinity itself. If one rejects the reality of original sin or the reality of its basis in a historic

Fall, one rejects the doctrine itself. If one rejects the reality of the empty tomb (Emil Brunner), one rejects the Resurrection itself, all protestations and formal Chalcedonian theology to the contrary notwithstanding. If one rejects the reality of the miraculous events making up the Exodus, one denies the Exodus itself. If one rejects the reality of my justification before God or makes it merely an "image" of the Gospel working in me (Faithful to Our Calling, p. 26) or of the "Gospel event" (ibid. what does that mean?) and thus implies that such language is figurative and not literally descriptive of what actually happens, one denies justification itself.

It has been no pleasure for me to speak in such a candid and frank manner about what I consider to be serious doctrinal differences in our midst. I would have far preferred to have spoken in simple, positive and traditional terms about our most precious faith, professing my personal faith in the Gospel, my love of the brethren and my dedication to the church and its mission of reconciliation. But I was asked to react in terms of the situation in our dear church as I see it. And this is what I have seen; I cannot see a house divided against itself--my house!--and remain silent and passive. May our merciful God graciously lead us to repentance so that we might ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and find rest for our souls. (Jer. 6:16).

ROBERT D. PREUS